Heaven's Revolving Door? Cosmology, Entrance, and Approach in Hebrews

Nicholas J. Moore

Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham

Abstract

The significance of "entering" and "approaching" terminology in Hebrews has been contested, with some scholars viewing these terms as clearly distinct, and others arguing they are fully synonymous. This debate is often framed in eschatological terms: *when* rest or heaven is entered. This article instead explores these questions from a cosmological point of view. First, language of "vertical" and "horizontal" as applied to Hebrews' cosmology is critiqued for its imprecision and lack of explanatory power with respect to the entrance and approach passages in the letter. In place of a neat vertical/horizontal distinction, it is suggested that we find a complex and plural, yet nevertheless consistent, distinction between earth and heaven. Secondly, four passages in Hebrews are examined at greater length in the context of OT and Second Temple period texts, in order to demonstrate that it is more coherent in cosmological terms to regard approaching and entering as separate rather than identical movements.

Key Words: Hebrews, Cosmology, Exhortation, προσέρχομαι, εἰσέρχομαι, Scott Mackie, Vertical, Horizontal

Introduction

Language of entering and approaching in Hebrews is integral to its view of theological reality and to its hortatory strategy for perseverance. Believers "are entering" rest and are urged to make every effort to enter it (4:3, 11); they are exhorted to draw near to the heavenly throne of grace (4:14–16); Jesus has entered the heavenly sanctuary (9:12, 24); and believers have a hope that enters behind the curtain (6:19), and an entrance which is a new and living way into the sanctuary (10:19–20). The relationship between the two terms, προσέρχομαι and εἰσέρχομαι, and between their two contexts, wilderness and cultus, have justifiably been the subject of some discussion, most importantly in John

Scholer's 1990 monograph *Proleptic Priests*.[1] Scholer frames the question primarily eschatologically, concluding that προσέρχομαι relates to living believers' approach to God and εἰσέρχομαι to dead believers' presence with God.[2]

A significant challenge to Scholer has been mounted by Scott Mackie, whose extensive and erudite scholarship on Hebrews bears on this question at various points – most pertinently in a recent essay entitled "Let us draw near… but not too near"[3] – and who will therefore be my primary interlocutor in the second half of this article. Mackie reads Hebrews as evidencing a strongly realized eschatology, and argues that approach and entrance are equivalent and currently available. Indeed, my own contribution to the debate is also eschatologically orientated, being framed in terms of who enters or approaches, what is entered or approached, and, crucially, *when* that entrance or approach takes

[1] John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 49 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 91–149 on προσέρχομαι and 150–84 on εἰσέρχομαι.

[2] Each of these terms sub-defines, for the relevant group (living or dead), a third key term τελειόω, "to perfect:" "τελειοῦν in Heb. encompasses the distinctive significance we found for προσέρχεσθαι and εἰσέρχεσθαι and relies on the context in order to determine whether it is access during life or after death." Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 200. Scholer also envisages a full and final state beyond that of those dead believers who have entered, which will take place at the eschaton.

[3] Scott D. Mackie, "'Let Us Draw near... but Not Too near': A Critique of the Attempted Distinction between 'Drawing Near' and 'Entering' in Hebrews' Entry Exhortations," in *Listen, Understand, and Obey: Essays on Hebrews in Honor Gareth Lee Cockerill*, ed. Caleb T. Friedeman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017); see also "Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (2011): 77–117; "Ancient Jewish Mystical Motifs in Hebrews' Theology of Access and Entry Exhortations," *NTS* 58 (2012): 88–104. Note too Jody A. Barnard, *The Mysticism of Hebrews: Exploring the Role of Jewish Apocalyptic Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.331 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 63–72, 171–212.

place.[4] The approach of this article is to explore the two terms from a cosmological angle instead; that is to say, in place of who, what, and when, the focus falls on the *where*. This has two outcomes: it reinforces the impression of a consistent, even if complex, distinction between heaven and earth; and it lends weight to Scholer's distinction of entrance and approach over Mackie's conflation of them.

First, I correlate the two *movements* of entrance and approach with the two *directions* of vertical and horizontal, which are often found in scholarly discussions of Hebrews' cosmology. I do this in part to critique the latter distinction and the uses to which it has been put, in order to suggest that Hebrews' cosmology, although complex, can be treated as essentially consistent. Then we turn to the cosmological associations of language of entrance and approach, focussing in particular on four passages (Heb 4:14–16; 6:18–20; 10:19–25; 12:18–24). In concluding, I shall draw out some implications for the letter's cosmology.

How to Get to Heaven: Upwards, Sideways, Both, or Neither?

The concept of movement is inherent within language of entrance and approach, and the categories of "vertical" and "horizontal" would seem to offer a way to assess the direction of this movement in spatial and cosmological terms.[5] In what follows, then, I will correlate these movements and

[4] Nicholas J. Moore, "'In' or 'Near'? Heavenly Access and Christian Identity in Hebrews," in *Muted Voices of the New Testament: Readings in the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, ed. Katherine M. Hockey, Madison N. Pierce, and Francis Watson, Library of New Testament Studies 587 (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 185–98.

[5] For terminology of "vertical" and "horizontal" in discussion of Hebrews, see Paul Ellingworth, "Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews," *EvQ* 58.4 (1986): 337–50; George W. MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 179–99; (references here are to the reprint, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews," in *Studies in the New Testament and Gnosticism*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington and Stanley B. Marrow [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987], 80–97). Some scholars use the terms with quotation marks, suggesting an awareness of the difficulties to which the terminology gives rise, as for example Kenneth Schenck (see n. 7 below) and Mathias Rissi: "Wie im irdischen Heiligtum vollführt der Hohepriester im himmlischen nicht eine 'vertikale,' sondern eine 'horizontale' Bewegung." *Die Theologie des*

directions. I argue that this juxtaposition reveals that the vertical/horizontal distinction is of limited use, and this leads to a critique of the way in which it has been applied and the suggestion that it does not permit us to see in Hebrews either two discrete cosmologies or two discrete layers of tradition.

"Horizontal" and "vertical" in Hebrews scholarship

The vertical/horizontal distinction is given classic expression in Paul Ellingworth's article, "Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews."[6] Ellingworth deploys the distinction purely spatially,[7] whereas it is often applied to Hebrews to distinguish horizontal eschatology (promised land, rest, Jerusalem) from vertical cosmology (heavenly sanctuary).[8] Indeed, George MacRae distinguishes the Hellenistic conception of the cosmos as a temple from the apocalyptic notion of a temple in heaven, and describes the latter as "horizontal" eschatology and the former as "vertical" eschatology.[9] That is to say, this distinction has been applied not only *within* cosmology, but also to distinguish *between* cosmology as a whole and another category, eschatology, and *within* eschatology alone. These uses

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Hebräerbriefs: Ihre Verankerung in der Situation des Verfassers und seiner Leser (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 39.

[6] Cited in n. 5 above.

[7] As does Kenneth Schenck, who in discussing the local sense of διά in Heb 9:11 comments that this would work with both "a 'vertical' heavenly structure consisting of lower heavens and the highest heaven and […] a 'horizontal' structure located somewhere in the heavens," *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 143 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162.

[8] See, e.g., Richard J. Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.328 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 98, 130, 131; Georg Gäbel, *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.212 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 126; John W. Kleinig, *Hebrews*, Concordia Commentary (St Louis, MO: Concordia, 2017), 16. I have also used the terminology this way, Nicholas J. Moore, "Jesus as 'The One Who Entered His Rest': The Christological Reading of Hebrews 4.10," *JSNT* 36 (2014): 384.

[9] MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology," (ed. Harrington and Marrow), 89–90.

are not mutually compatible, they illustrate the imprecision of the terminology and the consequent possibility of confusion, and they suggest that the vertical/horizontal distinction has limited heuristic usefulness. Here I restrict myself to using the distinction spatially, but even with this precision problems will emerge in the following discussion.

Entering and approaching horizontally and vertically

Ellingworth notes that the author's cosmology is generally latent, and identifies eight especially problematic passages where overt and distinctive soteriology intersects with latent cosmology.[10] Of these eight passages, six involve language of entrance and/or approach (4:14; 6:19–20; 7:25–26; 9:1–14, 24; 10:19–25). The remaining two relate to Jesus' cosmological situation (lower than angels, 2:9; in the heavenly sanctuary, 8:1–2), and can thus be connected with explicit statements elsewhere in the letter regarding the movement he made to get there (in the former case: entering the world, εἰσέρχομαι, 10:5; in the latter: passing through the heavens, διέρχομαι, 4:14, or entering heaven, εἰσέρχομαι, 9:24). It can be seen, then, that the concepts of entering and approaching in Hebrews are intimately connected with both cosmology and soteriology.[11]

To explore this relationship further, I tabulate below these six passages from Ellingworth according to their use of entrance/approach language and their use of directional imagery, whether vertical, horizontal, or containing aspects of both, as classified by Ellingworth.

	Entrance	**Approach**
Vertical	*4:14 Jesus has gone through (διέρχομαι) the heavens*	4:16 let us approach Jesus who has gone through the heavens 7:25–26 those who approach God through Jesus, who is exalted above the heavens

[10] Ellingworth, "Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews," 338–39; cf. Jon C. Laansma, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean McDonough, Library of New Testament Studies 355 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 138.

[11] Laansma notes that verbs of movement are prominent in relation to cosmology, "Cosmology of Hebrews," 127.

Horizontal	6:19–20 the anchor enters behind the curtain, Jesus has entered on our behalf	
Aspects of both	9:1–14 Jesus entered the sanctuary through the greater tent, not of this creation 9:24–25 Jesus entered heaven (like the high priest enters the most holy place) *10:19 we have an entrance (εἰσόδος) to the sanctuary*	10:22 let us approach the sanctuary

Italics = terms cognate with προσέρχομαι and εἰσέρχομαι

This chart suggests that there is no clear correlation of approach or entrance with either vertical or horizontal spatiality. Furthermore, there is reason to question Ellingworth's analysis of at least one of the passages. In the context of the letter as a whole, 10:19–25 has vertical connotations, coming as it does at the end of the central cultic section of the letter (Heb 7–10, or on some views beginning as early as 4:14) which makes extensive use of the earth/heaven distinction. However, taken on its own the spatial imagery in the passage is essentially horizontal, that of entry into the most holy place, and there is no explicit reference to heaven in this exhortation, and indeed no reference to heaven or to the tabernacle in 10:1–18 either (with the exception of an allusion to heavenly space in 10:12).[12] Hebrews

[12] Second Temple Jewish texts tend towards one of two views when it comes to conceptualizing heaven in cultic terms, which it is worth recording although this will not bear directly on the discussion here: either (i) cosmos as temple, i.e. the whole universe is a sanctuary, with its different parts (heaven, earth, sea) reflecting the different compartments of the temple (most holy place, holy place, outer court, etc.); or (ii) temple in heaven, that is they regard heaven as containing or being co-extensive with a temple. Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 111–44; MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology," (ed. Harrington and Marrow), 82–85 describes the former as Hellenistic and the latter as apocalyptic. The distinction between these two options is not absolute or entirely mutually exclusive, but it is remarkably prevalent – most literature of the period displays one or the other points of view. MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology," (ed. Harrington and Marrow), 85–88 sees both views in Hebrews; Mackie, "Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism," 83 also seems to view both in Hebrews blending into one another. It is worth noting as well that the vertical/horizontal distinction may correspond to the cosmos as temple/temple in heaven distinction, in that vertical ascent more naturally suggests movement from one (lower) part of the cosmic temple into another (higher) part, whereas horizontal movement towards or into a sanctuary tends to correlate with the idea of a temple in heaven. Again, however,

10:19–25 should therefore be categorized as horizontal. This point can be applied more widely: the sanctuary imagery, just like the promised land imagery, is in and of itself entirely horizontal (at least at first glance – we shall return to this shortly); it is only vocabulary of heaven that prompts scholars to speak of vertical space, and such language is dominant in 4:14 and 7:25–26, and also present in 9:1–14 and 24–25. In this light, and adding other references to entrance and approach in the letter, the fuller chart now appears as follows.

	Entrance	Approach
Vertical	*1:6 God brings the firstborn into the οἰκουμένη (εἰσάγω)* ***4:14*** *Jesus has gone through (διέρχομαι) the heavens* 10:5 Jesus enters/ed the κόσμος	**4:16** let us approach Jesus who has gone through the heavens **7:25–26** those who approach God through Jesus, who is exalted above the heavens
Horizontal	3:11, 18, 19, 4:6b wilderness generation (do not) enter Canaan 4:1, 3(x2), 5, 6a God's faithful enter rest[13] **6:19–20** the anchor enters behind the curtain, Jesus has entered on our behalf *9:6 the priests enter the outer sanctuary (εἴσειμι)* ***10:19*** *we have an entrance (εἰσόδος) to the sanctuary*	**10:22** let us approach the sanctuary 12:18, 22 you have (not) approached Mt Sinai/Mt Zion
Aspects of both / unclear	**9:1–14** Jesus entered the sanctuary through the greater tent, not of this creation **9:24–25** Jesus entered heaven (like the high priest enters the most holy place)	10:1 those who approach in worship 11.6 those who approach God

Bold = passages identified by Ellingworth; italics = terms cognate with προσέρχομαι and εἰσέρχομαι

neither of these correlations is absolute, and the problematization of vertical/horizontal terminology will complicate this picture further.

[13] The language of entering rest further shows up the inadequacy of the term "horizontal," as it functions geographically with regard to Canaan but eschatologically with regard to divine rest, whether or not this is also understood spatially as a "resting place."

This more complete chart reinforces the initial impression that there is no clear pattern to the directional associations of entrance and approach language. While the precise location of individual verses in the table could be disputed and even changed, it would be very difficult to claim that there is a consistent pattern of, for example, approach functioning vertically and entrance functioning horizontally.

A further important observation can be made with regard to the two exhortations at 4:14–16 and 10:19–25. Whatever is made of the exact structural function of these blocks,[14] they very clearly mirror each other in a number of ways, including their hortatory nature, the command to draw near, the references to confidence and holding fast. Given this parallelism, it is perhaps surprising that 4:14–16 should operate vertically whilst 10:19–25 operates horizontally. This observation is all the more striking when we consider that the "vertical" exhortation, 4:14–16, follows the *horizontal* construal of entry into rest in Heb 3–4, whereas the "horizontal" exhortation, 10:19–25, follows the primarily *vertical* portrayal of the heavenly sanctuary in Heb 7–10. Far from indicating a simple conflation, lack of consistency, or layering of traditions, then, this instead suggests that the author of Hebrews deliberately plays with and intertwines vertical and horizontal imagery.[15]

"Horizontal" and "vertical" in the biblical tradition

[14] I regard them as forming an *inclusio* demarcating the central section of the letter, following, e.g., George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

[15] In this connection note the deliberate appeal to paradoxicality in some early Jewish literature, in order to express the otherness of the heavenly realm, Philip S. Alexander, "The Dualism of Heaven and Earth in Early Jewish Literature and Its Implications," in *Light against Darkness: Dualism in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and the Contemporary World*, ed. Armin Lange et al., Journal of Ancient Judaism / Supplements v. 2 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 169–85, at 177–78. I would not describe Hebrews as paradoxical in its depiction of the heavenly realm, but the complexity of its portrayal of heaven may serve a similar function.

One further crucial point is thrown into relief by attention to Heb 12:18–24. This passage contrasts what the audience have not approached – Mt Sinai, not mentioned by name, representing the old covenant – and what they have approached – Mt Zion, representing the new covenant. Mountain tops as a place of encounter with the divine are a commonplace in ancient literature, and this significance is at least in part related to their vertical elevation.[16] This symbolism is enhanced in the case of Mt Zion, which is the location of Jerusalem and the temple, the sacred space identified with God's footstool. A vertical dimension thus pertains to temple, city, mountain, and indeed promised land as a whole. This could be illustrated by reference to a number of OT texts; for the sake of brevity the following discussion is restricted to the Psalms of Ascent, in their final form a liturgical provision for the great Jerusalem festivals.

The Psalms of Ascent (120–34) are not directly cited in Hebrews, but by the Second Temple period they formed a distinct collection associated with the annual festivals, and the conceptual world they reflect will not have been unfamiliar to our author, whose predilection for the psalms is evident. The title of these psalms in itself indicates the vertical orientation of heading to the temple. Although it has been suggested that the term מעלות refers to the stepped parallelism found in these psalms, this structural feature is neither universal within nor unique to this collection of psalms. A more likely explanation draws attention to the connection to the verb עלה, "to go up," and associates the term with pilgrimage[17] and especially its final stage, the cultic procession up to the temple mount itself.[18] This interpretation is echoed by the LXX translators' rendering οἰδὴ τῶν ἀναβαθμῶν, the term ἀναβαθμός

[16] In addition to Mt Zion, one can note Mt Olympus among the ancient Greeks, the location of temples on most if not all of Rome's seven hills, and in the biblical tradition Mt Horeb (Exod 3:1–6), Mt Sinai (e.g. Exod 19:3, 20), and the prominence of the "high places," for the worship of Yahweh primarily but also other gods (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 3:2 with 11:7); note also, e.g., the mountain as a place of revelation in 1 En 17.2.

[17] Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–50*, 2nd edn., Word Biblical Commentary 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 146, 219–21.

[18] So Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 2.208–9.

referring to the steps of the temple court (cf. *m. Mid.* 2.5; *m. Sukk.* 5.4, which connect the 15 psalms with the 15 steps from the court of women to the court of Israel).

Psalm 118, not a psalm of ascent but closely associated with Passover, speaks of joining the festal procession up to the altar (v. 27; cf. Ps 122:3–5). In Ps 121:1–2 the psalmist lifts his eyes to the hills to see help coming from the Lord, who made heaven and earth (cf. Ps 124:8); the hills themselves represent God's protection of his people in Ps 125:1–2; while in Ps 123:1 the psalmist lifts his eyes to God, whose throne is in heaven. Particularly significant is Psalm 132, which in vv. 7–8 identifies the temple as God's dwelling place, his footstool, and the resting place (ἀνάπαυσις) for both him and the ark; in vv. 14–15 Zion is described as God's chosen dwelling, his resting place (κατάπαυσις), and the place of his throne.[19] All of these psalms witness to a strong vertical element in the otherwise horizontal movement of pilgrimage, primarily in its final stages in association with the temple, but also in connection with motifs that apply more widely to the city (Mt Zion), the surrounding area (hills) and the land (rest).

The discussion of Mt Zion in Hebrews 12, which prompted this brief foray into the Psalms of Ascent, also contains strong explicit indications of vertical cosmology ("heavenly Jerusalem," v. 22, "heaven," v. 23; and all the more so if we consider the following verses, with God warning "from heaven," v. 25). However, the significance of the OT passages we have just considered is not that they strengthen the case for reclassifying this particular passage as "vertical," but rather that a whole range

[19] Cf. also the other occurrences of κατάπαυσις in the LXX, which with two exceptions refer to the resting place of the ark, God, or his people – i.e. the temple or the land, or in the case of Isa 66:1 heaven (Num 10:36; Deut 12:9; Ps 95:11; 1 Chr 6:16; 2 Chr 6:41; Jdt 9:8; 1 Kgs 8:56 is in the context of Solomon's dedication of the temple and thus likely refers to rest as land/sanctuary rather than state); in the two exceptions it refers to the Sabbath day (Exod 35:2; 2 Macc 15:1). See J. Cornelis de Vos, "Hebrews 3:7–4:11 and the Function of Mental Time-Space Landscapes," in *Constructions of Space III: Biblical Spatiality and the Sacred*, ed. Jorunn Økland, J. Cornelis de Vos, and Karen Wenell, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 540 (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 172.

of motifs in Hebrews which at first sight appear to function horizontally in fact also have vertical connotations, whether or not vocabulary of heaven explicitly accompanies them. These include rest, the homeland, Mt Zion, Jerusalem, and the city, as well as the sanctuary. This is true both in the biblical sources for this material and in Hebrews' own deployment of them.

Conclusion

The above discussion does not entail that we should abandon language of "vertical" and "horizontal" altogether, but it does show that such language is not unproblematic. Three points in particular emerge: i) this terminology can too readily be used in an imprecise or contradictory manner, a danger which scholars can and should avoid by careful definition and deployment; ii) it does not clarify the author's cosmological imagery, which at times conflates the two directions and at times sequences them in unexpected but apparently intentional ways; iii) ultimately the vertical and horizontal directions are inseparable in relation to the core motifs of Mt Zion, Jerusalem, rest, and sanctuary, both in the biblical tradition and in the ways Hebrews uses them. This combination of inherited conflation and intentional patterning suggests that this conceptual distinction cannot be used as a key to distinguish two different cosmologies in the letter, one traditional and one novel,[20] nor can it separate the author's perspective from that of his audience.[21]

As for language of entrance and approach, this has neither solved the problem nor rendered it intractable. Such language tends to follow the directional nuance of its context. In addition, language of approach seems to be correlated with the direction of the prevailing entry imagery in the near context, though it is worth noting that in the two major exhortations in chapters 4 and 10 this is not εἰσέρχομαι but a related term. The breakdown in a clear distinction between the horizontal and

[20] *Contra* Ellingworth, "Jesus and the Universe in Hebrews," 348–50, who claims the "vertical" language stems from the primitive Christian tradition, and the "horizontal" language develops from the author's own distinctive typology.

[21] *Contra* MacRae, "Heavenly Temple and Eschatology," (ed. Harrington and Marrow), 90, 95 who argues that the author's "vertical" Hellenistic eschatology "shores up" his audience's "horizontal" apocalyptic eschatology.

vertical does however suggest that, though the fine detail may be complex, the author maintains a consistent heaven/earth distinction throughout his letter.[22] This in turn enables entry and approach language to be considered together across the letter as a whole, without divorcing the promised land and city from the sanctuary, and it is to this we now turn.

Entering Heavenly Space[23]

In spatial terms, language of entrance is clear cut. Where it describes the passage from one geographical or local place into another, as in the entrance to Canaan or the tabernacle's inner sanctuary, it serves as a model for a decisive movement from one cosmological realm into another. Jesus goes through the heavens (4:14), enters heaven (9:24), the κόσμος (10:5), the (heavenly) sanctuary (6:20; 9:12, 24, 25); believers will enter God's rest (3:11, 18, 19; 4:1, 3, 5, 6, 11).

The kind of entrance that is most soteriologically significant and receives the most attention is entrance into heaven; in this light, Heb 10:5 is the exception that proves the rule – here the author introduces Christ's speech with an almost parenthetical note, "when he entered the world (εἰσερχόμενος εἰς τὸν κόσμον)." The author has explored the soteriological importance of the incarnation in Hebrews 2, and the later passage, 10:5, demonstrates that in his terms entrance involves passing from one cosmological space into another. The notion that entrance involves a major transition is not a point of contention between Mackie's interpretation and Scholer's; what matters is who enters, and whether "drawing near" is synonymous with entry.

[22] So, e.g., Edward Adams, "The Cosmology of Hebrews," in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. Richard Bauckham et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 133–35.

[23] As noted in the introduction, the fullest articulation of the distinction between entrance and approach in modern scholarship is Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*. In light of the recent and thorough challenge to this view mounted by Scott Mackie, the rest of this article constitutes a rearticulation, development, and defence of a position which is more or less that of Scholer, focussing on the interpretation of four specific passages in Hebrews, and engaging Mackie as my primary interlocutor.

Hebrews 6:18–20: Entering through the Curtain

One passage which must detain our attention a little longer – and which Mackie describes as "the one pertinent use"[24] of εἰσέρχομαι – is Heb 6:18–20. These verses describe the strong encouragement of those who have fled to seize the hope that lies before them, and continue "we have this hope like a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, and entering into the inside of the curtain, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner on our behalf." Jesus' entry in v. 20 is uncontroversial, and conforms to the pattern we have observed above. It is worth pausing to note that he is described as πρόδρομος, one who runs on ahead of others, which in itself suggests a distinction between the time of Jesus' entry and believers' entry, although it does not decisively determine whether believers have or have not yet entered. It is also worth noting the conceptual similarity between πρόδρομος and the word ἀρχήγος, which describes Jesus in Heb 2:10 and 12:2. The latter term has a general meaning of "leader" or "founder," but is pertinently found in LXX Numbers 13 to describe the spies who enter Canaan ahead of the people. In Hebrews too, Jesus' transition into "glory" (2:10) or to the right hand of the divine throne (12:2) is in view, in connection with – yet distinct from – the transition of God's people into the same domain.[25]

Returning to Hebrews 6, we find in v. 19 the participle εἰσερχομένην, which refers back to the anchor.[26] The anchor of hope enters behind the curtain – it would seem clear that the curtain referred

[24] Mackie, "'Let Us Draw Near,'" 21.

[25] So for example David Moffitt states that "a fundamental difference [from apocalyptic literature] is that instead of envisioning all of God's people entering the promised land together, Hebrews imagines one Son entering ahead of everyone else – Jesus, the ἀρχήγος […], entered the promised land ahead of the rest of the people," *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 128.

[26] It is possible for εἰσερχομένην to take "hope" as its antecedent rather than "anchor," although there is little difference overall between the two options given that the anchor is introduced as "like" the hope. So Samuel Bénétreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2 vols., *Commentaire Évangélique de la Bible* (Vaux-sur-Seine: ÉDIFAC, 1988), 1.265.

to here is that which screens off the inner most holy place.[27] Here we observe some slippage in Mackie's argument. He states:

> when [the community] "flee" (καταφεύγω) into the security of the heavenly sanctuary they will find this hope within their grasp, and when they "seize" it (κρατέω, 6:18), it will become "securely and reliably anchored" (ἄγκυραν ... ἀσφαλῆ ... καὶ βεβαίαν) within their innermost being (ψυχή, 6:19), firmly fastening them to their "forerunner" (πρόδρομος, 6:20), Jesus. Moreover, by this hope the community is presently "entering" (εἰσέρχομαι) "the innermost reaches" beyond the curtain (6:19).[28]

There are two problems here. One is the glossing of "flee" with the extrapolation "into the security of the heavenly sanctuary," when the text remains silent on the location to which the audience have fled.[29] Mackie's appeal to the city of refuge tradition is of little help here, even when he conflates it with the account of Adonijah taking hold of the horns of the altar in 1 Kings:[30] the altar in question must be the altar of burnt offering, located *outside* the sanctuary proper, as any trespass within the holy or most holy place would have resulted in death and not the clemency that Solomon shows (cf. 1 Kings 1:50–53; 2:28). The other problem is the subjective interpretation of images which are in fact more concrete: hope "lies before" (προκειμένης) us, and does not *become* "reliably anchored" when we grasp hold of it but is so already; it is not anchored within the soul, engendering a sense of hope within us, but anchored within the curtain, fastening the soul to a firm external reason for hope.[31] The hope enters, the community does not. To see Heb 6:18–20 as an affirmation of believers' entry into the heavenly sanctuary, then, is unjustified. Indeed, this is to misread the imagery of these verses, which speaks of something and someone entering so that we, *although we have not yet entered,* may nevertheless have confidence that the benefits of that entrance avail us (the anchor) and that we will

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[27] So William L. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2 vols., *Word Biblical Commentary* 47 (Dallas: Word, 1991), 1.154. Contrast G. E. Rice, "Hebrews 6:19: Analysis of Some Assumptions Concerning Katapetasma," *AUSS* 25 (1987): 65–71.

[28] Mackie, "'Let Us Draw Near,'" 31–32.

[29] This is not infrequent in Mackie's writing; cf., e.g., "the exhortations to 'draw near' (προσέρχομαι) *and enter* the heavenly sanctuary" and "calls to *enter* the heavenly throne room," Mackie, "Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism," 94 (emphasis added).

[30] Mackie, "'Let Us Draw Near,'" 32.

[31] Of course, subjective assurance is quite naturally attendant upon the objective grounds for hope.

enter at some – as yet unspecified – point (the forerunner).[32] These verses establish a close connection between two cosmological realms, rather than locating believers and Jesus in the same heavenly realm.

Approaching Heavenly Space

We now turn our attention to the most contested language, that of approach. The passages of particular relevance are Heb 4:14–16; 10:19–25; 12:18–24, and they are treated in reverse order. Mackie acknowledges that it is ultimately unclear whether approach language implies the community's mystical heavenly ascent, or the manifestation of heaven on earth, but is emphatic that it describes an actual transition and rejects any attempt to "spiritualize" it.[33] By contrast, I will seek to show that approach denotes a privileged proximity to the heavenly realm which is an innovation on the author's part, yet *without* transition from one part of the cosmos to another.

Hebrews 12:18–24: Approaching Mt Zion

Paul Ellingworth describes the use of προσέρχομαι in Hebrews 12:18–24 as "the author's strongest expression of eschatological hope," with Christians "already participating […] in the life of a supernatural city."[34] Gareth Cockerill puts it even more directly – "By bringing God's people into the Most Holy Place, Christ has brought them to the true Mount Zion" – and speaks of the coalescence of images of promised land, Jerusalem, Zion, temple and most holy place.[35] Against such confident

[32] So David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 251–52. *Contra* Gareth Lee Cockerill, who states that, e.g., the audience "seek safety *in* the heavenly sanctuary," *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 288–93, at 289 (my emphasis).

[33] Mackie, "Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism," 97–99, 117.

[34] Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 677–78.

[35] Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 651–53; so also Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 648–49.

statements, I suggest there is good reason to view approach to Mt Zion as distinct from entry, for at least four reasons.

It is worth noting first that, although the wider context is hortatory, these verses do not themselves constitute an exhortation but rather offer a statement of the believers' location (taking the perfect tense-form of προσεληλύθατε in 12:18, 22 in a stative sense). The use of προσέρχομαι is thus subtly different from that found in the exhortations of Hebrews 4 and 10: here the author does not exhort his audience to current or imminent approach, but rather makes a statement about an approach that they have already made. We are dealing not with repeated entrances into heaven but current location. This suggests that the most holy place and Jerusalem are not identical (as in Cockerill's formulation above) but rather function slightly differently in the author's argument, and that προσεληλύθατε denotes conversion rather than worship.[36]

Secondly, the biblical account of Sinai must be considered. These verses in Hebrews describe the covenant and mountain of Sinai as well as of Zion; 12:18–21 is as important as 12:22–24. The contrast between the two lies precisely in this: believers *have* approached Mt Zion in a way that they *have not* approached Mt Sinai. The Israelites, who did approach Mt Sinai, stopped at its foot and did not go up onto it (Exod 19:12, 17); this same movement is predicated first negatively and then positively of the new covenant people. To read approach to Zion as entry introduces a contrast between *approaching* Sinai and *entering* Jerusalem which neither the biblical background nor Hebrews' own shaping of the contrast supports.

Thirdly, in these verses themselves there is no suggestion of a transition on the community's part into that heavenly space, even though the contrast between the covenants includes the foreboding nature of the first and the festal nature of the second. The explicit mention of the perfected spirits of the

[36] So, e.g., James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 267; contra Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 648.

"faithful departed" in the heavenly Jerusalem (v. 23) distinguishes them from the present, living community, whose location is one step removed from theirs. The same is true of the angels who, as Ben Witherington notes, "are already celebrating, but then they are in heaven," whereas "believers are on the verge or edge of the consummate reality," not yet having entered.[37] Indeed, in the following verses we read of a voice warning "from heaven" (ἀπ'οὐρανῶν, v. 25), which supports the notion that the audience's location, although near the heavenly Jerusalem, is not at this stage in it.[38] And fourthly, the wider context of the letter reinforces this interpretation: believers are yet "to inherit salvation" (1:14) and are "eagerly waiting" for Christ's return (9:28),[39] and the heavenly city itself is explicitly described as still "to come" (13:14).[40] Language of approach in Hebrews 12, then, denotes nearness to heaven but not presence within it, consistent with its use elsewhere in the letter as we shall see below.

Hebrews 10:19–25: Approaching the New Entrance

We turn next to consider the two major paraenetic blocks in Hebrews 4 and 10. In Hebrews 10:19–25 a series of four striking exhortations fall like hammer blows in each of vv. 22–25. They are preceded by a series of descriptions of what believers possess, introduced by the participle ἔχοντες in v. 19.

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[37] Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 341. Cf. Bénétreau's comment: "Les chrétiens, toutefois, ne sont pas encore installés dans la cité de Dieu : ils sont proches, ils ont accès […], mais ils restent aussi des pèlerins," *Hébreux*, 2.194.

[38] Underlying deSilva's discussion, rightly in my view, is the notion that this heavenly celebration lies in the future, an interpretation reinforced by the immediately following warning in 12:25–29; *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 466–69.

[39] Georg Gäbel suggests that this corresponds to the high priest's return from the most holy place: "die Parusie wird dem Hervortreten des Hohenpriesters aus dem Heiligtum entsprechen," *Kulttheologie*, 319.

[40] Eschatological tension is preserved on my reading by the temporal imminence and spatial proximity of heaven; see Knut Backhaus' helpful discussion of paradox in this passage: "Die Glaubenden haben bereits jetzt […] an Gottes Wirklichkeit teil; sie haben aber das Ziel ihres Weges noch nicht erreicht," *Der Hebräerbrief*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009), 442.

Believers have παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον of the sanctuary, the heavenly most holy place described at length in Hebrews 8 and 9. The vast majority of translations and interpreters render this with a verb, "confidence *to enter*." The noun εἴσοδος, like its English counterpart "entrance," can refer either to the act of entering or to that through which one enters, so an active interpretation is not impossible.[41] It is, however, made unlikely by v. 20, which offers an additional definition of this entrance as ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν, a new and living *way* or *path* through the curtain, one which has been inaugurated or *opened* (ἐγκαινίζω).[42] Believers have confidence that there is an entrance to the most holy place – confidence that access to God has been made available through Jesus' blood. This is a remarkable and unprecedented statement: a way through the tabernacle curtain stands open, visibly open; and yet the existence of this entrance forms the basis for an exhortation not to enter, but to draw near.

The LXX reinforces this point: where προσέρχομαι has cultic connotations in the OT, it is used to describe the approach of the whole people,[43] or of the priests or Levites,[44] or to forbid certain people from approaching the tabernacle or parts of it;[45] it is also used to describe the approach of Aaron or the high priest to the altar of burnt offering in Lev 9:7, 8. Strikingly, however, it is never used to

[41] For a fuller statement of my argument here see Moore, "'In' or 'Near'?," 195–96.

[42] Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*; BDAG.

[43] Exod 12:48 (alien may approach for Passover if circumcised); 16:9 (approach Lord); 34:32 (approach Moses after he has spoken with God); Lev 9:5; Num 27:2 (Zelophehad's daughters, near tent of meeting before Moses); Deut 4:11 (Mt Sinai, cf. Heb 12:18); 5:23 (draw near to Moses after Sinai).

[44] Num 17:5[16:40] (approach to burn incense).

[45] Num 18:3 (non-priestly Levites may not approach furniture or altar), 4 (no non-Levite may approach), 22 (not approach tent of meeting); Lev 21:17, 18, 21, 23; 22:3 (prohibiting impure priests from approaching altar, curtain, or offerings).

describe entrance into the most holy place.[46] To draw attention to this point is not to impose the sense of the word in the LXX onto the text of Hebrews,[47] but simply to highlight the fact that if the author had wished *unambiguously* to exhort his audience to pass through the curtain via the now-open entrance, a verb of entrance would have been required and not προσέρχομαι, since it nowhere in its cultic usage carries this meaning.

The idea that a passage through the curtain is open in a way that benefits believers is reinforced by the very next exhortation, which picks up on the language and conceptual framework of 6:18–20:

> 10:23 let us hold fast (κατέχωμεν) to the confession of our hope (τῆς ἐλπίδος) without wavering
> 6:18–19 we have strong encouragement to seize (κρατῆσαι) the hope (τῆς ἐλπίδος) set before us[48]

Although the image of the anchor has dropped from view in chapter 10, the concept of holding fast to hope, hope that enters through the curtain, remains present. The conceptual undergirding of Heb 10:19–25, then, is consistent with 6:18–20: Jesus' presence in heaven is of very real benefit to the believer, despite the believer's continuing presence on earth; the development in Hebrews 10 is to give greater prominence to the entry way that has been prepared by Jesus' decisive crossing of that boundary.

Hebrews 4:14–16: Approaching the Throne of Grace

It is the parallel hortatory passage in Heb 4:14–16 that is most difficult, and that we consider last of all. This passage speaks of the decisive entrance of Jesus into the highest of heavenly spaces, passing "through the heavens" (v. 14), and on this basis urges believers to draw near to the "throne of grace"

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[46] In the LXX προσέρχομαι refers to "the priestly access to the sanctuary, altar and first tent" (note the omission of access to the second tent/inner sanctuary), and to the people's "approach to God, their worship and prayer;" Scholer, *Proleptic Priests*, 91–94, here p. 94.

[47] As Mackie alleges, "'Let Us Draw Near,'" 21.

[48] The difference of verb between 6:18 and 10:23 is inconsequential, especially given 4:14 which forms a kind of middle term here: κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας (cf. 6:18–19, κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος, and 10:23, κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος) – or, better, 10:23 combines 4:14 and 6:18–19.

(ὁ θρόνος τῆς χάριτος, v. 16). Although the expression is without parallel, what is in view is clearly the divine throne, present in heaven and represented by the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant in the earthly most holy place.[49] The exhortation to approach this throne is the closest Hebrews comes to suggesting that believers actually do enter the heavenly sanctuary. There is little in the text to indicate how we should understand this exhortation. If the arguments above are found convincing, then one should expect προσέρχομαι here to conform to its usage elsewhere in the letter, indicating proximity but not entrance.

There are moreover parallels to this concept of approaching but not entering the divine throne room or most holy place in Ezekiel, the Enochic Book of Watchers (1 En 1–36), and the *Testament of Levi*. It is important to be clear about how exactly such apocalyptic texts are being adduced – whether they are relied on primarily to contrast with or to confirm what we find in Hebrews – and to acknowledge that they exhibit both similarities (in terms of heavenly ascent and vision of a heavenly sanctuary) and also a number of differences from the letter.[50] The differences include the following: most ascent narratives are the preserve of a privileged or unique individual, often narrated in the first person; there is a guiding angel; they often take place during dreams rather than when awake; and even to the individual concerned it can be unclear as to whether an ascent is bodily or not, as with Paul in 1 Cor 12:1–10 (the earliest clear reference to bodily ascent is in 2 Enoch 1.3–3.1). As David Moffitt documents clearly,[51] bodily ascent in this literature entails glorification or transformation, which is in view in Hebrews only for Jesus in the present age – and as I shall demonstrate below, bodiless or spiritual ascents stop short of entry into the highest heaven, most holy place, or throne room.

[49] The reference is clearly to "God's throne," and "the context allows at most an indirect allusion to a heavenly counterpart of the earthly temple's mercy seat," Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 270. Most commentators opt for this, e.g. Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 227–28; Bénétreau, *Hébreux*, 1.200; Backhaus, *Hebräerbrief*, 190–91 emphasizes both the political and religious aspects of this throne.

[50] See Moffitt, *Atonement*, 163 for a concise summary of similarities and differences.

[51] Moffitt, *Atonement*, 163–81.

In these ways the texts differ markedly from Hebrews, which in chapters 4 and 10 exhorts corporate, conscious, and intentional approach to God. There are texts which witness to a communal mystical experience of angelic worship, such as the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*[52] and Philo's *On the Contemplative Life*, where the worship of the Therapeutae has mystical elements (note the passing references to their true spiritual sight, *Contempl.* 11, 27),[53] but these also present problems: it is not clear whether the community's worship is intermingled with or distinct from the angelic worship, or whether the presence of angels indicates the worshippers' presence in heaven. It is notable in these latter examples that there is no explicit description of *movement*, and therefore the ascent narratives remain more pertinent to our discussion.

Ezekiel 41:3 is marked in its difference from the rest of the account of the new temple that the eponymous prophet sees in his vision: when he and his angelic guide come to the inner sanctuary, in place of the usual transitive form "he led/brought me in/to" (e.g. 40:17, 24, 28, 32, and notably 41:1), we find a third person singular intransitive verb, "he entered" (ובא / καὶ εἰσῆλθεν). In other words, the angel enters, but Ezekiel does not.[54] A similar contrast is found in later apocalyptic literature. In *T.*

[52] On which see Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 391–94.

[53] Note in this regard Barnard's treatment of pertinent mystical motifs in relation to Hebrews, *Mysticism of Hebrews*. A similar approach is taken by Mackie, "Jewish Mystical Motifs."

[54] Though less explicit, the same distinction is discernible in Isaiah and Daniel: in Isa 6:4 the mention of the *doorposts* and *thresholds* shaking implies that the prophet stands outside the most holy place; in Dan 7 there is a difference between Daniel, who "sees" (חזה / ἐθεώρουν, 7:9), and the son of man who is "led into" (הקרבוהי / οἱ παρεστηκότες παρῆσαν αὐτῷ, 7:13) the presence of the ancient of days on his throne. The Book of Revelation does not distinguish the most holy place in its portrayal of heaven, and lays a strong emphasis on heaven's openness (Rev 4:1; 11:19; 15:5–8; 19:11), but in essence heavenly entrance pertains only to unique figures (John, though possibly only in spirit, Rev 4:2; the two witnesses, 11:12), or to the "faithful departed" (6:9–11). Ephesians 2:6 most directly contrasts with my reading of Hebrews here, although even this describes not a *movement* of ordinary believers into the heavenlies in worship, but rather their permanent *status* or position

Levi 2–5 the patriarch is told to enter, and then enters the first heaven (2.6–7); from here he sees the second heaven (2.8), and is told by an angel that he will see another, third heaven which is even greater (2.9), where he will stand near the Lord (2.10).[55] This third or highest heaven is the most holy place, the dwelling of the Lord's glory (3.4).[56] At the end of the angel's explanation of the heavens, he opens the gates of heaven for Levi,[57] who sees "the Holy Most High sitting on the throne" (5.1). Levi is described as *near* the Lord, and he looks *through* the gates, but he is never said to enter this space.[58]

A similar pattern can be observed in 1 Enoch 14–15.[59] Enoch sees a vision and goes beyond the clouds to a great house, the heavenly temple; when he enters the house, in a further vision he sees a

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there. The later Christian text *Ascension of Isaiah* also offers a stark contrast: Isaiah enters the seventh heaven (9.1, 6) where the angels draw near and worship God (9.28–42); here he both can and yet cannot see the glory of God on the throne (9.37–39; 10.2).

[55] For 1 Enoch and *T. Levi* the text used is James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 2009).

[56] There are several recensions of *T. Levi*, some of which attest seven heavens rather than three; for a discussion of these and the likely influences on them, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apoocalypticism*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 50 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 25–30.

[57] The text of *Aramaic Levi*, though fragmentary, contains the phrase "the gates of heaven" in the vision account; Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov, eds., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 135.

[58] If Kugler is correct in his reconstruction of the original *Testament of Levi*, then the multiple heavens in 2.7–4.1 are a later insertion, and Levi does not enter lower heavens; it nevertheless remains the case that in 5.1 heaven's gates are opened and Levi *sees* God on the throne rather than *entering*. Robert A. Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest: The Levi-Priestly Tradition from Aramaic Levi to Testament of Levi*, Early Judaism and Its Literature 9 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 180–83.

[59] Alexander considers 1 Enoch 14 to be the earliest clear attestation of heaven as a parallel universe, with "a clear ontological boundary that can be crossed in either direction only with extreme difficulty. When it is

second house, greater than the first – the most holy place (14.13–20). At this point (from 14.14) verbs of movement give way to verbs of sight. Inside this second house he sees God's throne, and he can hear God's voice. God calls him to approach (14.24), and Enoch is lifted up and "brought near to the gate" (14.25).[60] It is significant here again that he does not enter the most holy place, the location of God's throne and glory. There is some uncertainty in what follows, however: in 15.1 God again says "come near and hear my voice." There is no description of Enoch moving or approaching following this call, and while Nickelsburg considers the possibility that "Enoch actually enters the room," in light of this silence and the explicit lack of entry in 14.21, he argues it is more likely to be a repetition of the earlier command to draw near in 14.24.[61] It would seem, then, that in the Enochic Book of Watchers we have a description of drawing near to God's throne in heaven without actually entering the most holy place.[62]

I do not want to suggest that these apocalyptic visionary ascents to heaven straightforwardly prove my reading of Hebrews 4:16. They do however offer accounts of a kind of heavenly access that nevertheless stops short of entering the most holy place, the very presence of God himself; by contrast, accounts of humans entering this space are rarely if ever found. Now, Mackie engages this literature extensively; both his argument and mine rely not on the simple assertion of similarity or difference, but on the careful delineation of where any similarities and differences lie. Mackie argues that the key difference in Hebrews lies in the use of the same motifs to represent *access* rather than

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crossed, as happens from time to time, the event has cosmic significance." Alexander, "Dualism of Heaven and Earth," 170. This description fits Hebrews' cosmology equally well.

[60] Alexander notes that the inner house is larger than the outer house, an indication that "heaven is in a different dimension, or is a parallel universe, to the earth," "Dualism of Heaven and Earth," 173–74.

[61] George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 1–36; 81–108*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 270.

[62] A similar movement is in operation in the Book of Parables, where Enoch's heavenly ascent stops short of entrance into the house (1 En 71:5–11), though here there is only one house and Enoch does not see into it.

inaccessibility.[63] This is possible. But on the reading I am proposing, the line of continuity is in the conception of the utter glorious holiness of God in his innermost dwelling place; the difference, for Hebrews, lies in Jesus' radical transformation of the heavenly access that God's people enjoy: not access within the inner throne room, but rather an unprecedented *universality* of access to its threshold, through which all can now see.[64] One of the earliest extant readings of Hebrews supports this notion: in *1 Clement* 36, a part of the letter where the influence of Hebrews is most prominent, Jesus is described as the high priest through whom "we *gaze into* the heights of the heavens" (ἀτενίζομεν εἰς τὰ ὕψη τῶν οὐρανῶν, 36.2).[65] The kind of experience narrated in the apocalypses has now become possible for all God's people, and not just the privileged few: the possibility of seeing into, though not yet entering into, the most holy place where God dwells in glory on the throne.

Conclusion

At this point I turn to my conclusion, and to a significant point of agreement with Mackie. All that he claims in terms of *aural* and *visual* proximity to divine space is I think absolutely correct.[66] Believers see Jesus and hear his voice. Drawing near to God enables this hearing and seeing. But it is also precisely this that means actual heavenly entrance now is unnecessary as well as uncountenanced by Hebrews' author. Seeing Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, through the open way he has inaugurated for them, and hearing his voice speak to them from heaven, believers are assured that even though they are not presently in heaven, their forerunner has already arrived there and therefore they will

[63] See Mackie, "Jewish Mystical Motifs."

[64] Contrast here the inaccessibility implied by armed guards of various kinds who stand at the threshold of a holy sanctuary, e.g. in Gen 3:24; 1 En 71:7; *Heikhalot Rabbati* 17–18 (on which see Alexander, "Dualism of Heaven and Earth," 174–76). And note Nickelsburg's comments that "Enoch's is a special case', and "it is paradoxical that Enoch gets as far as he does', *1 Enoch 1*, 260.

[65] Bart D Ehrman, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols., *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.98–99.

[66] Mackie, "Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism," 99–115; e.g., "the author wants them to 'see' into the heavenly future," past their present sufferings, p. 100.

surely arrive there too if they will wait patiently and faithfully. Rather than repeatedly entering heaven (and, presumably, leaving again) through a revolving door, in its worship the community sees ever more clearly that Jesus is holding the door, as it were, and has confidence (παρρησία, 4:16; 10:19) that what he opens, no-one can shut.

As for Hebrews' cosmology, two implications can be highlighted. The first has to do with *consistency*: the author envisages a clear distinction between earth and heaven, and is careful not to blur these boundaries. While the presentation of heavenly space varies through the letter, and the details are not always clear, there remains a significant ontological dualism between earth and heaven which the author is at pains to preserve. Secondly, however, these findings emphasize the *proximity* of earth and heaven, the thinning of the boundary between them. The boundary still exists, and its significance must not be understated – after all, it cost Jesus his suffering and blood to traverse it in such a way as to make it possible for human beings to cross it too – but it is also transformed into an open curtain. Whether Hebrews envisages a combination of earth and heaven at the eschaton, or the removal of the former to leave just the latter, this open border which the faithful presently approach assures them that they will also have a future in the renewed cosmos when, at the last, they enter in.